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CLAIMS:

505B17 1. A method of operating an apparatus intended to permit access to services provided on subscription by a first provider, which method enables access to services offered by a second provider, characterized in that access to services offered by a second provider is refused by the apparatus, except when the subscription taken out by the first provider has a certain period or length of service.

505B17 2. A method as claimed in Claim 1, making use of scrambled communication, characterized in that the apparatus verifies two conditions, namely, on the one hand, if the scrambling method is the same for the two providers and, on the other hand, if the period of the subscription taken out by the first provider exceeds a given period of time, and authorizes access to services offered by the second provider if these two conditions are satisfied.

505B17 3. A method as claimed in Claim 1 or 2, characterized in that the date of first use of the subscription is automatically registered by the apparatus when it is put into use for the first time.

004411-11 4. An apparatus provided with means intended to permit access to services provided on subscription by a first provider, which apparatus enables access to services offered by a second provider, characterized in that the apparatus is provided with control means for authorizing or not authorizing access to services offered by a second provider, means for computing the difference between the date of first use of the subscription taken out by the first provider and the current date, and in that the control means are arranged to authorize access to services offered by the second provider if said difference between the dates exceeds a given value.

5. An apparatus as claimed in Claim 4, characterized in that it is provided with means for automatically registering the date of first use of the subscription when the apparatus is put into use for the first time.

6. An apparatus as claimed in Claim 4 or 5, characterized in that it is provided with means for delivering a warning message when the subscription period is not sufficient to authorize access to certain services.